

The INQUIRER

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Making
sense
of the
senseless

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Making Sense of the Senseless

By Sarah Tinker

What makes people decide to come to church on a Sunday morning? Over the years I've wondered if people's choices of what to do on a Sunday are affected by the weather, or the service title, or whether we're offering lunch afterwards. One factor in central London is transport; which tube lines are running, which bus routes are diverted. Faced with a more difficult journey than usual, it's hardly surprising if people decide to go to their local park instead. But however disrupted London's transport system was, when people woke up to news of another terrorist attack they clearly wanted to come to church. Some set off earlier than usual. Others arrived late. Some joined us for the first time. Most had a story to tell of their journey and of conversations at bus stops and on the tubes. That shows June 4th was an unusual day. Most Londoners will tell you, 'we don't talk to strangers on public transport'; except when something bad has happened. And something bad *had* happened – again.

Our conversations after the service were thoughtful and deep. We shared stories, reactions. Our listening to one another seemed more careful and caring than usual. I wonder if similar conversations are happening in your congregations. Here are just some of the areas we explored:

The frighteningly random nature of such attacks. 'We often cross that bridge. We live nearby.'

The vulnerability of human flesh and the impossibility of keeping everyone safe from those who choose to hurt us.

The pain of those whose lives or loved ones are lost or forever damaged by violence.

A pride in the actions of the emergency services and those brave individuals who ran towards danger to help others, rather than saving themselves.

The shock and fear when we hear of such attacks. An uncomfortable need to keep checking the news.

A worry that excessive news coverage does the terrorists' publicity work for them.

How we furtively look around on the tube, obsessively check out young men with rucksacks, then feel ashamed of ourselves and wonder what it must feel like to be on the receiving end of people's anxiety.

Knowing that worse attacks are happening around the world on a daily basis. And that we are less horrified by attacks in Kabul, Baghdad, Mogadishu or Lahore than we are by violence in London or Manchester.

Concern that such attacks are so quickly followed by calls to limit civil liberties, and for further blame to be heaped upon immigrants.

We ask how we might better reach out to Muslim communities and individuals, knowing that such attacks make them ever more vulnerable.

Wondering what leads to such violence, asking if anything can be done to reduce terrorism – or is this to be our 'new normal'. We shudder at the terminology, and the possibility.

Holding on to messages that strengthen us – of hope not hate, of love's great power.

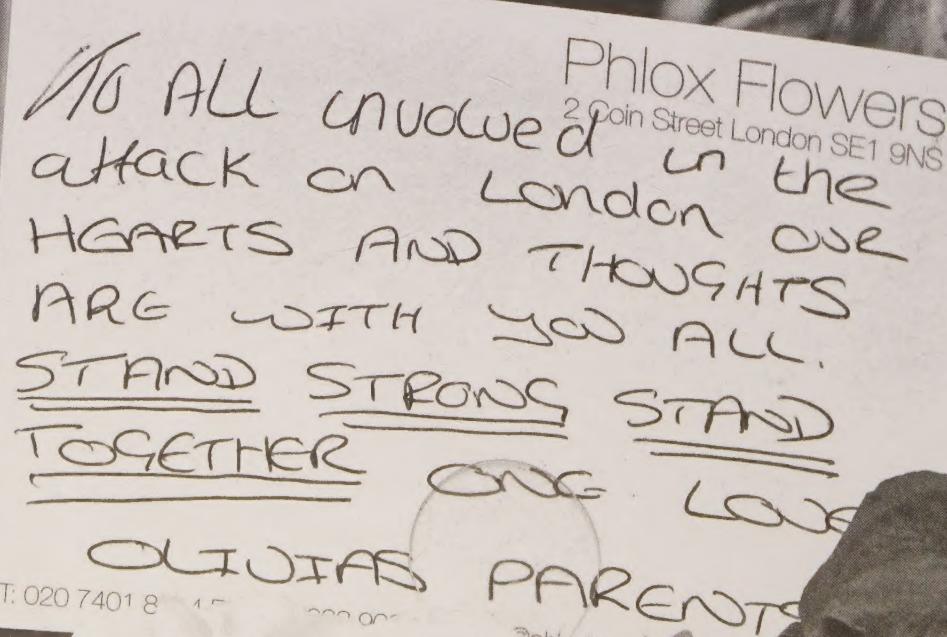
In the service we read the prayer found at Ravensbruck, (page 3) which prays for those of good will and ill will. Not everyone could pray for perpetrators of violence.

We agreed with my London ministry colleague Andy Pakula's words, (page 3) which remind us that fear is the greatest enemy, as it can lead to suspicion and hatred.

Talking at church really helped me on Sunday June 4th. We tried to make sense of the senseless, attempted to explain the inexplicable.

In the face of life's uncertainty and complexity, it's good to have a place to talk.

The Rev Sarah Tinker is minister with Kensington Unitarians. Below: flowers sent to Borough Market by the parents of Manchester bombing victim Olivia Campbell. Photo by David Holt





When we see the stranger
And look on his ways with fear
When our suspicion grows
And hatred comes close to hand
Let us know that these others are not the enemy
The enemy is much closer
Much harder to eradicate
Its name is fear
And knowing this can be its undoing
Let us journey toward understanding
Toward compassion
Toward justice
Toward love.

— Andy Pakula
Minister at New Unity, London

Words found at Ravensbruck Concentration Camp

O Lord, remember not only the men and women of goodwill, but also those of ill will.
But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us.
Remember the fruits brought forth from this suffering: our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of this; and, when they come to judgement, let all the fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.
Amen.

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring
religion through the worship of
God and the celebration of life; the
service of humanity and respect for
all creation; and the upholding of the
liberal Christian tradition."**

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Floral tributes left at Borough Market, London, after the attack there on 3 June.
Photo by David Holt via Wikimedia Commons

Inquiring Words

Once again a candle for all those affected.

A scandal in the world

Where we are more than ever connected

Yet disconnect.

Let these suffering now

And others be respected,

Love accepted hate rejected

And wherever and whenever

We can

Do our very best

Every woman every man

To connect.

— Mark Hutchinson

UNITARIAN THEOLOGY CONFERENCE 2017

Fri 13th - Sat 14th October

500 Years On -- *The Reformation must continue!*

Mill Hill Unitarian Chapel, City
Square, Leeds LS1 5EB

FRIDAY 13TH OCTOBER: 'GOD'

(Starts at 11.30 with Worship) + SPEAKERS:

- 1) **Ant Howe:** 'Wrestling, Resisting and Resting': different ways of responding to the Divine voice. On the theology of talking to God.
- 2) **Jane Blackall:** *Models of God and the Meaning of Love.* Do our experiences of love shape our concepts of God?
- 3) **Lewis Connolly:** 'The Unchained Spirit': *Kenotic Theology and The Unitarian Epic.* Exploring 'Death of God' theology.
- 4) **PANEL DISCUSSION** with the speakers, followed by 'Pub Theology'.

SATURDAY 14TH OCTOBER: 'UNITARIANISM'

(Starts 9.30 am with short Devotions) + SPEAKERS:

- 1) **Ann Peart:** *Theology from Women's Experience.* Unitarian women's engagement with theology and gender.
- 2) **Justin Meggit:** *Early Unitarians and Islam: radical dissent and its consequences.* How encounters with Islam in 17th Century England helped shape Unitarian identity and belief.
- 3) **Stephen Lingwood:** *What is our Unitarian good news?* Do we have a message for souls seeking salvation?
- 4) **PANEL DISCUSSION** with: **Claire MacDonald, Lucy Harris, Robin Hanford.** (To end at 3 pm).



All welcome! There'll be breaks for tea and meals.

No entry charge, but donations will be welcomed to cover costs.

[Organised by the Revs Jo James, Jim Corrigall and Stephen Lingwood]

Further information: corrigalljim@gmail.com – or phone Jim: 07909 572 279



Lose the scarcity mentality: P

By Danielle Wilson

Many people hear the word ‘prosperity’ and immediately think ‘money’ or ‘wealth’ or something along those lines. And when you saw the headline, perhaps a few of you thought, ‘Oh good, I’m going to learn how to get wealthy.’ No, that is not what prosperity is about.

My take on prosperity is that it is first and foremost a spiritual exercise. We do not obtain prosperity without first acknowledging and expressing gratitude. Then, we can grow closer to the Divine as well as continue to re-align to our spiritual selves through the regular practice of gratitude.

One of my jobs is Finance Officer for OneSpirit Interfaith Foundation, the organisation I trained with to become a minister. I’ve been doing the job for 10 years now. It incorporates all of my best skills, i.e. attention to detail, bookkeeping, and now, the Spiritual Laws of Prosperity (or SLP for short). I stumbled across SLP in a rather erratic fashion. Once I started learning more about what it meant, I realised I had already been practicing many of the principles in my own life. I was already supporting students to find ways to manifest the money to pay their fees. But this work extends much deeper than finding money.

Talking and walking

I trained with the Rev Maggy Whitehouse to become a qualified prosperity teacher. I did it in order to get my own financial house in order. I realised I could not be of service to the students unless my own finances were in better shape.

I needed to talk my talk and walk my walk. For years, I had been avoiding big financial decisions. Immediately after the workshop, I took action. I sold some assets, paid off my mortgage and largest credit card bill (not insubstantial sums!). Within just a few weeks, things started to shift. I received a refund of around £600 from the credit card company because they had taken the monthly direct debit in spite of my having previously paid off the balance.

Just a few weeks after that, I learned my electricity supplier had been estimating my bills for the last nine years and I received a substantial refund. Also, having divested myself of my two largest debts, I then had a surfeit of funds each month. I remember saying to myself, ‘I don’t know what to do with all this money!’ So, for the first time, I was able to start saving some money every month. I even started donating to a charity on a regular basis.

All this may have been pure coincidence, but I believe it is related to energetic flow.

Money is nothing more than energy – and to ‘work’, energy needs to flow. Money needs to go *out* as well as come *in*. Once those channels are clear going both ways, things just start working!

It was all about energy

What I had done was to unblock the energetic channel which was stopping me from gaining financial stability. I had been operating under a scarcity mentality, believing I didn’t have enough and so could not afford to give any away – much less attend to some pretty dire debt. I had the resources to resolve the debts but was stuck (energetically speaking) in not being able to make any decision at all.

Prosperity goes much deeper than how much money you have in the bank, or how many things you own. Prosperity is

a state of mind or consciousness. And, conversely, when one is not operating from prosperity consciousness, scarcity consciousness takes over.

An example of operating from a scarcity mentality: A few years ago I was having some bodywork done on my car. I’d been given the free loan of a car from the body shop for six weeks. The only requirement was to bring it back in the same condition, with a quarter of a tank of petrol. For the next six weeks, every time I ran low on petrol, I would only top up minimum amount of petrol every few days so that I didn’t ‘overfill’ it. God-forbid I should put *too much* petrol in the car!

Leaving scarcity behind

Then one day, I stopped at the body shop and I saw my own beloved car for the first time in weeks. They had done such a beautiful job of restoring it, that I was overwhelmed with gratitude. I did some serious examination of my motives and mental state around filling the petrol tank. I realised that all along I had been operating from a scarcity mentality, i.e. don’t overfill the car with petrol, get away with paying out as little as I have to, etc. And when I recognised how mean spirited I had been, I thought to myself, ‘I’ve had *free use* of this car for weeks, the least I can do is fill the tank and wash and valet it.’

The whole episode had started out with a meanness of spirit (on my part) and resulted in a *complete* turn around to become, hopefully, generosity of spirit. (Well, I certainly felt more generous and kindly after going through that experience.)

It is important when trying to examine prosperity or abundance, that one also examines the underlying factors which may be driving a scarcity mentality. In the West, this can be set up by any combination of a number of different scenarios:

- Misinterpretation of Christian scripture which teaches us from an early age that ‘it is better to give than to receive’, ‘don’t look after yourself, others must come first’, ‘easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the gates of heaven’ and so on.
- The dynamics around money coming from the family of origin. There may be a father who spends every single penny, putting strain on other household resources. This may be offset by a mother who spends absolutely nothing, particularly not on herself. And so the pattern gets laid down early. This gives very confusing messages to the children about the meaning of money – on the one hand: spend everything as fast as you can vs. don’t spend anything at all, particularly on self, i.e. look after others first. And somewhere in there one needs to find a balance, a truth that is real and works for the self.
- There may have been negative messages used about those who have money (fat pig, money grabber, filthy rich, etc.) or even derogatory words about money itself (filthy lucre, etc.).

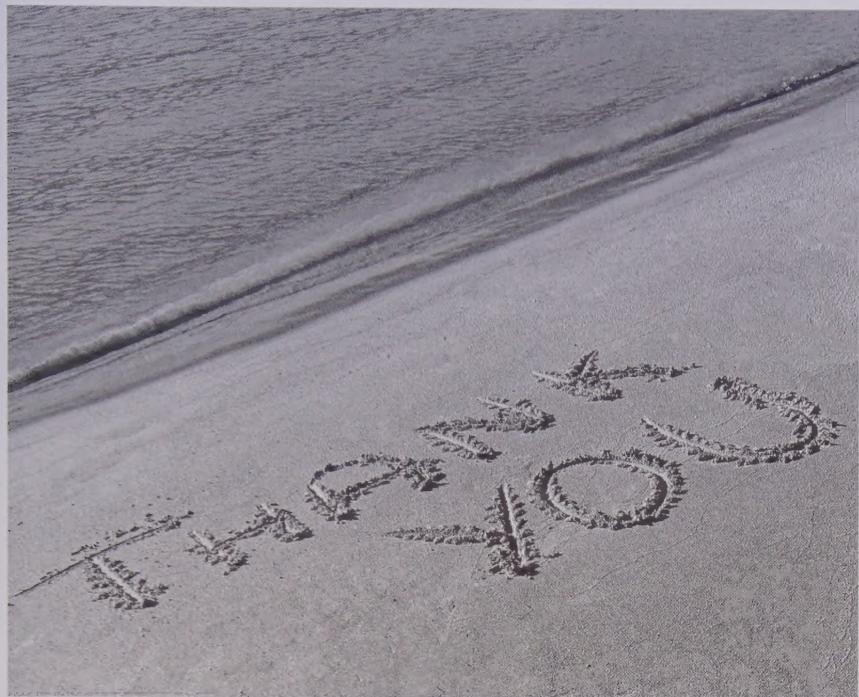
Fight self-sabotage

Anyone who grows up with these conflicting messages will become an adult who is afraid of having abundance. They will therefore subliminally sabotage any efforts the Universe might make to send more their way.

When moving towards prosperity from a place of scarcity, the misconceived notion is that prosperity will fill the lack created by scarcity. Just look at the number of lottery millionaires who have become alcoholics or drug addicts because, in the end, having the money itself doesn’t really solve anything at all.

But, if one moves towards prosperity from a place of existing abundance, one says to the Universe ‘*Thank you* for all I

Prosperity as a spiritual exercise



Shutterstock photo.

have already *and* I'll have some more please!'

Expressing gratitude is the first step in changing one's mindset from a place of scarcity to a place of existing abundance. You may think, 'I am already expressing my gratitude. So then why am I not prosperous?'

More consciousness

Expressing gratitude makes us more fully conscious of the vast abundance that is already in our lives. But gratitude alone does not *make* us prosperous. We need to take action to heal the underlying dynamics which drive the scarcity mentality.

I've developed a number of questions and practices for ministry students to challenge underlying beliefs about money, etc.:

1. What is the real, underlying issue around scarcity, e.g. feelings of unworthiness (I'm not good enough/poor or rich enough/someone else needs more help than I do [e.g. is more deserving]/whatever) ... to ask for/receive help.
2. What was the attitude in your family towards money? Review how money was talked about in your family/growing up? (filthy lucre, filthy rich, fat pigs, money-grabber, money is the root of all evil, rich man not entering gates of heaven etc.) This will inform how you view money today.
3. What was your childhood conditioning towards looking after yourself. Were you free to ask for your needs to be met. Were you able to treat yourself? We are generally taught that we look after others first, which many interpret to mean we don't look after ourselves *at all*.
4. What religious messages did you receive in your family of origin around abundance? There are many misinterpreted Biblical messages.
5. What pattern in your life is this scarcity repeating/reinforcing?
6. What comes up for you around asking for help? (i.e. fear of appearing to be less than perfect or sorted/others need help more than you do/feelings of unworthiness/unmet historical needs/etc.)
7. Do prosperity affirmations – (Fear attracts exactly what

is feared so if we focus on lack we will create it but if we focus on prosperity we will create that instead.)

8. Gratitude journal/practice: saying five times a day what you are grateful for – write it *or* say it out loud but *do not* just think it – the Universe needs to hear your gratitude

Just five things

What I suggest is expressing out loud, every morning (or evening), five things that you are grateful for that day, 'I'm grateful for a good night's sleep', 'I'm grateful for the nice smile the shopkeeper gave me', 'I'm grateful for my good health', 'I'm grateful for the bright sunshine today', 'I'm grateful for the beautiful location where I live'. No explanation, no justification, no negative comments. What you *cannot* do from one day to the next is to repeat your gratitudes. You have to find five brand-new gratitudes every single day. What this exercise accomplishes is threefold:

- It brings into sharp awareness how much abundance you *already* have in your life.
- It sends the message out to the Universe: 'Thank you for all the abundance in my life – and I'll have some more please.'

- It connects you to the Universe and *all* the abundance it has to offer

Since moving to the coast five years ago (after nearly 40 years living in London), I have been able to access my gratitude so much more easily. Some times I get 'stuck' at the level crossing, waiting for the train to pass through. Instead of getting irritated that this is delaying my progress, I stop, turn the engine off, open the car windows if possible and gaze out at the sheep and cows in the adjacent fields. I'm often heard thanking them out loud. Thanks for living in such a beautiful environment, thanks for moving down here – just simply thanks for all the abundance I have in my life that I can so easily access and appreciate. Sometimes I even cry when I see the sheep and cows in the fields – because I feel so grateful that I am able to notice all the beauty and abundance around me. And yes, there are some (infrequent) days when it is not so easy to access gratitude. Like all of us, I forget. But when I do remember – and it is more often than not – I am filled with abundant joy that my life is exactly as it is right now. And I give thanks to the Divine (and thereby to the Universe) for all that I have and for all that I enjoy.

I have struggled over the title of this sermon 'Prosperity as a Spiritual Exercise' – perhaps because more of what I am trying to convey is that Gratitude is really the Spiritual Exercise – connecting us to the Universe, connecting us to our rightful place in the order of things, connecting us to our Divine. Then by being so connected, we can experience a true Prosperity Mentality. All is as it is meant to be and I am living with all that I need. Accessing and acknowledging the gratitude paves the path towards Prosperity Consciousness and also strengthens the spiritual connection to Source of All.

May it be so for you now and always.

The Rev Danielle Wilson is an Interfaith minister and serves as the administrator for the London Unitarian District.

Look upon each other with compassion



A march to honour victims in the Manchester Arena bombing. Photo by Transport Pixels from England via Wikimedia Commons

On 23 May, like so many people I woke to the horror and disbelief at what had occurred that Monday in Manchester. I could hardly believe my eyes as I bore witness to the brutal murder of 22 innocent people and injuring of many more. There was a part of me that wanted to rush back, to be among the people of the city that has been my home for 20 years. Another part of me wanted to turn away. Part of me just couldn't bear to look.

Even at the best of times, I find it hard to watch the news. I prefer to read about the suffering in our world or listen to the radio, than to watch it with my eyes – especially the way rolling news is presented today. I spent a few days after the bombing with family and loved ones, a planned week's leave. I spent time at home in Yorkshire, and by the sea – always a place of solace for me.

I couldn't smile

That Tuesday I walked around Birstall in West Yorkshire where I grew up and found it hard to even look at people. They smiled at me as I passed. But I found it hard to smile back. As I walked around familiar childhood places, memories came into my being. I *re-membered*, I *re-felt* old experiences. Many were from 30 or 40 years ago, and some surfaced from a year ago, when I walked these very same streets in shock and horror following the brutal murder – by another fanatic – of the MP Jo Cox. I remembered my visit to Parliament just a few weeks earlier; a place where another hater of life would later commit more brutal acts of murder. And, at that time, I had no idea of the terror which would come to London Bridge on 3 June. Yet the feelings are much the same.

I thought of the troubles in our world, of the brutality we witness every day. The weekly shootings we hear of in America, how frequently these take place in schools and work places; the deaths of innocents in Syria and Iraq and the streams of displaced people and the suffering they face. I remembered other massacres of innocents, Dunblane and Anders Brevik and the mass shooting of 77 people in Norway in 2011, as well

From nothing to everything
by
Danny Crosby



as the countless terrorist atrocities we have seen throughout the world in recent years.

I also remembered the violence and fear I have experienced in my own life. I re-felt those feelings as I walked the familiar streets of home, alone. I wanted to look away. The people, though, they would not let me. As they smiled, something inside began to wake up once again. I kept seeing in them love and decency.

That evening and over the next few days I witnessed and heard of countless acts of love that occurred that terrible night and the days that followed in Manchester. Symbols of love and compassion from all kinds of ordinary people – I saw it with my own eyes. I witnessed people coming together in love, as people always do. Later in the week I visited 'Another Place'. This is a favourite place for me and I went there with one of my favourite people, a dear old friend. I went to Crosby Beach and stood with the Antony Gormley statues and I stared out to sea. I love to stand and stare at the sea, to let my eyes just take in the open vastness and simply experience 'Another Place'.

Eyes felt wide open

Whenever I do, I feel fully alive and connected to a Power far greater than myself. I feel this universal consciousness that creates and connects all life; this deeper aliveness which

(Continued on next page)

We can go towards 'Another Place'

(Continued from previous page)

I have come to believe is the consciousness at the core of everything. As I stood that day my eyes felt wide open once more and I could look at the world again. I began to see with renewed vision. It was powerful and it was deeply healing. 'The eyes of my eyes', were once again opened. My friend is a person who has seen me at my worst, and with whom I have shared intensely heart-breaking moments – too many for two people. She reminded me of a time when I was broken by grief, a grief she herself was not yet ready to surrender to at the time, even though it was infinitely more painful for her.

My body, broken with grief

She described how my whole body seemed broken. Her eyes witnessed this in me, and I know how much it hurt her, as she could not visit that place of grief yet. As she spoke I re-membered and I also remembered how this was another moment of healing when I would once again rise, as I began to face life once more.

I wouldn't be a minister, but for that time of grief. I wish it hadn't happened. If I could change it I would. But so much has come from that suffering. This is the healing that rises from life's suffering. This is the meaning that rises from the suffering and dispels all despair. It matters how we see life, how we look at life.

For how we see life will affect how we live in the world. Yes we all turn away at times; it gets to be too much. But we cannot do this for long. We need to look at the world with loving eyes, for the world needs it. We need to see the world through eyes that are fully awake, through conscious eyes.

This is not easy, by the way. It will hurt. For the awakened eye is the vulnerable eye, but it is the only way to live and it is the only way to see beauty and love. If we turn away, as we are all tempted to do at times, we will fail to see all that makes life worth living, worth dying for. The Gospels recount several examples of Jesus healing blind people. There are other occasions where he is found criticising the religious leaders of the time for their blindness. You will also find several occasions where Jesus's gaze – his eyes if you like – are mentioned; the way he looked at people, always with love and compassion even when rebuking them.

Clear-eyed compassion

There is something powerful in these examples; a powerful lesson is being taught about how we see and look at things; a lesson about how we should live in love and compassion, with our eyes wide open, bringing healing and love to all; so that they too can see once again through clear open eyes.

The key is to see the world through 'unfurnished eyes' as Emily Dickinson described them – eyes untarnished by the past and wide open. This is like seeing with eyes like the Buddha, uncluttered by attachments. That way we begin to not only envision, but also create the *Kingdom of Love*, the Kingdom of God right here. It begins by not turning away, no matter how hard it can be.

All we have to do is 'unfurnish' our eyes. All we have to do is see through loving eyes. Despite what we are told, love is not blind. For it is love that truly sees. Think about the people and the places you love. You notice greater detail about them. You see more than is seemingly in them. When

you gaze through loving eyes you become more conscious. Life just seems more alive, and you feel more awake. I did that day after the Manchester bombing as the people I passed compelled me not to turn away. By looking at me and simply smiling, I went to 'Another Place' and simply opened my eyes and gazed at the sea.

Just imagine what might happen if we saw all life and all people through such loving eyes? We would see more, which means life would hurt more at times. But we would also know more beauty and love, and we would bring more beauty and love into our world.

All we have to do is live with our eyes wide open. All we have to do is not turn away. Don't turn away. And if you do, don't turn away for too long. Instead, look at the world with open eyes.

Seeing the whole of life

To live with open eyes is to see the world as it truly is; to see reality, warts and all – and in its beauty spots too. To live with open eyes is not to turn away from suffering, but to also pay attention to life's beauty. To live with open eyes is to see the reality of the whole of life. This is not easy. So often we are tempted to turn away. To live fully connected lives we need to live with open eyes, to see life with all its blessings and curses.

Our open eyes allow us to recognise where we can act in the world, if our minds and our hearts are open. If we live with open eyes we will see clearly how we cannot turn away, for our world needs us to look on it with loving eyes.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister with the Altrincham and Urmston congregations.

Ministry Inquiry Day



Would you like to know more about training as a Unitarian & Free Christian Minister and about working with our congregations?

This summer the Ministry Strategy Group will be holding an Inquiry Day for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training.

There'll be chance to meet our tutors and recent graduates.

Venue: Leicester Great Meeting, LE1 4SX

Date: Wednesday 2nd August 2017

Time: 11am for 11.30 start – 3.30pm finish

Booking deadline: 26th July 2017

Advance booking is essential.

For more information and to book, please contact:

Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly,
Essex Hall, 1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY

Phone: 020 7240 2384 / Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

Letters to the Editor

When and where in 2018?

To the Editor:

Have I missed something? In past years, at the end of the Unitarian General Assembly meetings, we were told by the President where and when the next year's GA meetings would be held and the last thing said was 'See you all at _____ on _____. Can anyone help me please?

Mike Tomlin

Stockton Unitarians

Should Unitarian youth be shooting guns?

To the Editor:

In the 3 June issue of *The Inquirer*, I was dismayed to see inside the back cover an article on the Youth Movement with a picture of young people with guns! I think this is entirely inappropriate and it has really upset me. It was probably quite an innocent activity but with young minds we cannot encourage this.

I love the *Inquirer* and try to spread

my copy amongst members of my family. Not this time I'm afraid.

Colleen Skelton

Tenterden, Kent

Language switches won't help Unitarians grow

To the Editor:

Reading the 6 May edition of *The Inquirer*, I was dismayed by some of the items I read from the Unitarian General Assembly Meetings in Birmingham. I have to admit that I am something of an outsider at the moment, having no affiliation to any particular church, but I remain committed to the Unitarian cause and its core beliefs, so to see the movement going in what I think is the wrong direction I find upsetting.

I realise it is important to 'spread the gospel' and recruit fresh blood into the church, but tampering with language is hardly likely to do the trick. I find it laughable, for example, that 'godparents' should become 'guide parents', 'hymns' should become 'songs' and the 'chalice' should simply

become the 'candle'. As for employing advertising people, as worthy and well-meaning as they might be, and talking about 'successful brands', as if we were selling something like margarine, I find it distasteful.

Please don't ask me what my recipe for building up the church is, as, like many others from all denominations, I am clueless. Unless you abandon the traditional Sunday service altogether and turn us into one glorified social gathering, possibly avoiding a Sunday completely.

I in no way doubt the integrity of those trying to bring about change and I appreciate the hard work it must entail. I also hope that I am proved wrong and that these new developments bring some measure of success, but I remain sceptical as I have seen many trendy ideas in the educational world come and go in my time, without anything really positive come from them. We shall see!

Graham Williams

Bridgnorth

Unitarians cited in gay marriage study

Unitarians are cited in research by academics at the Universities of York and Leeds as one of the few denominations willing to perform religious same-sex wedding ceremonies. Overall, the research highlights the prevailing extent of discrimination against same-sex couples wanting religious marriage ceremonies in England and Wales. As this issue of *The Inquirer* goes to press, the Scottish Episcopalian Church is voting on whether to allow same-sex marriages within those dioceses. If it passes and is permitted to stand, the Scottish churches would be the first Anglican churches to assert marriage equality.

Prof Paul Johnson, from York's Department of Sociology, has examined the legal framework in England and Wales that allows religious organisations to refuse to marry same-sex couples. Working in collaboration with Professor Robert Vanderbeck at Leeds, Prof Johnson found that same-sex couples are excluded from approximately 40,200 places of worship in which opposite-sex couples can get married.

Same-sex couples are not permitted to marry in any of the 17,350 churches of the Church of England and the Church in Wales, or in nearly 23,000 other places of worship, such as Roman Catholic churches, Islamic mosques, and Hindu temples. Although same-sex marriage has been legal in England and Wales since 2014, religious organisations are under no obligation to extend their marriage services to gay couples.

Same-sex couples cannot marry in any of the 16,000 churches of the Church of England, or the 1350 churches of the Church

in Wales. Of the 22,884 other places of worship that are registered to solemnise opposite-sex marriage, 22,745 do not solemnise same-sex marriage (approximately 99.5 per cent).

There are only 139 places of worship registered to perform same-sex marriage in England and Wales, although this number does not take account of places in which same-sex marriage may be solemnised by Jews or Quakers.

In 2014, approximately 30 per cent of opposite-sex couples who married had a religious marriage ceremony, compared with 0.5 per cent of same-sex couples.

Opt-in decision

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 provides the means for organised religions – other than the Church of England – to opt in to conduct same-sex marriages, with the decision left to individual institutions. Only 139 places of worship are registered to perform same-sex marriage in England and Wales, meaning approximately 99.5 per cent do not offer it.

Just 23 same-sex couples had a religious marriage ceremony in 2014, compared with over 68,000 opposite-sex couples. Prof Johnson said: 'The level of discrimination is staggering. If you are a same-sex couple in England and Wales then you most likely live in a town where there is no opportunity to have a religious marriage ceremony.'

'That means you are completely shut out of a mainstream cultural practice that opposite-sex couples take for granted.'

(Continued on next page)

Tercentenary celebrated at Framlingham

By Matthew Smith

Built in 1717, Framlingham Unitarian Meeting House marked its tercentenary with an exciting and uplifting series of planned events over the weekend of 13-14 May.

Former minister, the Rev Cliff Reed was the speaker on Saturday evening for a well-attended special gathering called '1717 and All That' at which he traced the history of the Meeting House, and the most remarkable characters associated with it.

Perhaps chief among these fascinating figures were the courageous and influential abolitionist Thomas Cooper, who went on to be minister at the Meeting House later in life, and Goodwyn Barmby – who claimed to have introduced 'communism' into the English language, and who also invented the word 'communitarian' (quite fashionable nowadays).

Barmby, unlike Cooper, was never minister at Framlingham but was born at nearby Yoxford and his funeral was conducted in the Meeting House in 1881. The trajectory of his thought during his lifetime was from a radical Socialist and believer in communal living to a Unitarian minister of ardent Liberal political sympathies, as well as an accomplished poet.

Among those also acknowledged were Lucy Tagart and Florence Hill. Their financially generous support of the Unitarian cause at nearby Bedfield (during the ministry of Alfred Amey in furtherance of the Postal Mission – the Meeting House there having then closed in 2010) is a large part of the reason that the relatively new ministry at Framlingham with Bury St Edmunds has become possible so many decades later.

The Saturday evening event was further enlivened by music from international tenor, Adrian Cave, with accompanist James Recknell. Even the current minister, the Rev Matthew Smith, did a few musical turns, and the evening ended with a rousing rendition of the duet 'Excelsior' by Balfe, to words of



(l-r)James Recknell, Adrian Cave, Matthew Smith, Cliff Reed.
Photo by Martin Gienke

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow – evoking the era of Victorian parlour ballads.

HW Longfellow also featured prominently at the Tercentenary Service on Sunday afternoon, where Marion Baker, former Unitarian General Assembly (GA) president and member of the GA Executive Committee, constructed her theme around his words 'All are architects of Fate / Working in these walls of Time', from the poem *The Builders*. The Rev Matthew Smith led the service, with music provided by regular organist Robert Waller. The service was not solely a celebration of the past but highlighted our responsibilities to carry the flame of free, non-dogmatic faith from the present into the future.

Prior to the service, the goodly crowd had followed a splendid tea by listening to beautiful music provided by Zephyr Baroque.

Arranging the weekend was a collaborative effort between the congregation, trustees and minister and great credit is due to the volunteers who helped make it all happen.

The wonderful restoration of the Meeting House that took place in 2010, due to extraordinary hard work by trustees and friends at the time – making the building a more attractive place to worship and to hold other community events – was celebrated throughout the weekend. This change has been a big contributory factor to the small but significant revival taking place in the fortunes of the Meeting House, further boosted by the beginning of the new ministry in October 2014. Here's to the next 300 years!

The Rev Matthew Smith is minister to Unitarian congregations in Framlingham and Bury St Edmunds.

Marriage discrimination

(Continued from previous page)

'Recent reports describe same-sex couples "shunning" religious wedding ceremonies, but the reality is they are simply being denied the opportunity. Parliament has agreed a legislative framework for marriage that is allowing extensive discrimination, and the figures support this.'

Unitarians among 'minor faith groups'

Prof Vanderbeck said: 'Because none of the mainstream religious faiths will marry same-sex couples, such couples need to rely on minor faith groups, such as Unitarians, to be willing to marry them. The problem is, the couple might not share that faith.' Church of England Canon law, which defines marriage as the 'union of one man with one woman', co-exists alongside the contrary general marriage statute law allowing same-sex marriage, due to the religious protections included in the 2013 Act.

Sacred Spaces, Sacred Words: Religion and Same-sex Marriage in England and Wales by Paul Johnson (Professor of Sociology, University of York) and Robert M. Vanderbeck (Professor of Geography, University of Leeds) is published in the summer issue of the *Journal of Law and Society*. To read, visit: <http://bit.ly/2s70Kd3>



Gathered outside before the Tercentenary Service. Photo by Martin Gienke

News in brief

Dean Row Chapel holds a 'Big Breakfast'



On 21 May Dean Row Chapel, Wilmslow held a 'Christian Aid Big Breakfast' before the Morning Service. If you imagine the best Continental Breakfast in a five-star hotel, you will be exactly right. Nearly 40 members sat down to a selection of cereals, fresh fruit salad, yoghurt, meats, tomatoes, ham, hard boiled eggs, croissants, a crusty loaf, cheese, jams, marmalades, cakes, fruit juices, coffee and tea all prepared by members of the Women's League, Anne Gemmell, Mary Harrison, Dorothy Salthouse and other helpers.

Festive bunting adorned the hall, giving it a cheerful, celebratory feel. Dean Row Chapel member, Christian Aid Organiser Peter Weigh, had encouraged members of the congregation to participate in the Christian Aid Week 'Door-to-Door Collection' in Wilmslow.

The total sum raised by members of Dean Row Chapel for the Charity, including £400 in donations towards the Big Breakfast, was £1,252.

— Penny Johnson

Worship Studies Course helps students find their voices

By Stephanie Bisby

Students from around the country who recently completed the taught stage of the Worship Studies Course Foundation Step in York were lucky enough to have the expert guidance of two retired ministers: the Revs Andrew Hill and Margaret Kirk. We also benefited from the assistance of hymn-writer and composer David Dawson during the session on hymns and music, and of the Rev Lindy Latham for a session on stories in worship, during which we enjoyed an impromptu re-enactment of one of Arnold Lobel's delightful 'Frog and Toad' stories.

The four days of the course took place in York Unitarian Chapel, with the most local student coming from York and the furthest afield from Brighton. Thanks to the enthusiasm and openness of both students and tutors, the group soon formed a cohesive whole, as well as a Facebook group to stay in touch in between the study days.

The core material of the course is the same wherever you study it, but each set of tutors brings a particular focus and in the case of Margaret and Andrew, they encouraged us to write our own material and to focus on effective delivery.

Consequently, during the course, each of us wrote a chalice-

lighting, a prayer and a sermon, and delivered our sermon from the pulpit to an attentive congregation of fellow students, who then provided feedback on both content and delivery. This sounded nerve-wracking, and indeed it was to some extent, but the thoughtful, positive critiques given made it a valuable experience, and excellent preparation for the two assessed services which each student is required to complete before they can progress to the next phase of the course.

Participants varied from those who had been leading worship for some years, to those who had just signed up to take their first services. The course is perfectly designed to provide all the basic information required to get started, while also allowing experienced preachers to extend their skills and knowledge.

'I signed up for the course knowing that I could cobble a service together but struggling with feeling inauthentic, and terrified of giving a sermon!' said Claire Wilton, from York. 'I've gained masses of confidence thanks to the heartfelt support of both the leaders and my co-participants. It's been very, very worthwhile.'

Stephanie Bisby is a member of Upper Chapel, Sheffield.

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